CHAPTER IV

SALVATION ARMY IN TIRUNELVELI

AND KANYAKUMARI DISTRICTS

Tirunelveli district is thickly populated with rural and agricultural background. The density of population in this district surpassed the state average. Tamil language is the main language of this district. People of this area found separated into various religious and caste. The district had dampened Hindu population as per 1951 census. The people belong to different religious faiths. Majority is Hinduism, the rest was covered by various religious.

The inhabitations of the region belong to several castes such as Brahmins, Vellalas, Nadars, Maravas, Yadavas, Parayas and Adidiravidas. Traditionally, according to the Hindu Mythology, the Brahmins were priests who performed Poojas in the temples. They dominated the country education and occupied higher offices in the State. Maravas were the traditional warriors of Tirunelveli.

The industrious Nadars earned their livelihood by toddy tapping. The Parayas and Adidiravidas were the descendants of the aboriginals subjected to slavery in the hands of high castes. Their sufferings and humiliations in the hands of the high castes knew no bounds.

The Salvation Army party marched towards the southern districts of Tamil Nadu at the end of 1889. Palayamkottai welcomed the Salvationists and the work was started in Mud huts. Captain Norani (Clara Case) and another one lady were
appointed then. One Narayanamuthiah, a native of Palayamkottai opposed the Army vehemently and burned the barrocks of Army. So Salvation Army people were not in a position to establish their work.

In the mean time Captain Yesurathanam came to Palayamkottai in the last months of 1889. On 11\textsuperscript{th} November 1889 Muthaih accepted Jesus Christ and left all his properties to his sister Papamma and followed the Army officer as Fakir (beggar)\textsuperscript{1}. He had training under William Stevenson at Madras Mannady and commissioned as an officer on 19\textsuperscript{th} February 1890.

During this period a severe cholera epidemic pelted the southern part of Tirunelveli district. Many people died and many suffered. The Army officers working in Tirunelveli were also affected. Rev John Cox, an exmissionary of London invited the Salvation Army officers to have rest in his coffee estate called black estate, some 30km north of Nagercoil. On 27\textsuperscript{th} May 1892 the Army established its work at Attakulam village of Kanyakumari district. From 1910 -1940 Kadaikiramam village served as the one of the district head quarters of Salvation Army.

In 1901 Salvation Army started its work in the southern part of Tirunelveli. With the intervention of CMS missionary. Major Manickavasagam of Thirukkurunkudi stopped the Salvation Army work. By this time, Nambi Thoppu, Makiladi and Thenkarai came under the control of Salvation Army.

\textsuperscript{1} Major Peter, \textit{op.cit.}, p.17.
In the beginning of 1920 Salvation Army once again started its work at southern part of Tirunelveli. Major M. Thaniyar converted many peoples of Kumarapuram as Salvationist. Payadiyanvalan of Kumarapuram changed his name as Devasahayam. Major M. Thaniyal, Major Uittaprakash and Major Giruba Ammal are conducted prayer meeting at Kilakulam and Ambalavanapuram. They converted many people as Salvationists.

In the beginning of 1920 Major Uittaprakash established Salvation Army mission at Palaur. In 1921 the people of Kannankulam, Kanakappapuram, Vadakkankulam and Manickamputhoor were converted as Salvationists. With the help of Devasahayam’s, sister Salvation Army spread to the Perungudi and Kavalkinaru².

**Sanganeri**

The village was under the domination of a section of caste Hindus known as Vellalas. In 1920 Major M. Thaniyal and his assistant Chelliah met the people of Sanganeri and spread the good news. Two rich landlords of this village gave disturbance to the Salvationist and also beat the captain Swamidas and put down him to the well. With the help of the Salvationist, he rescued from the well. In 1929 Major Nalla Thambi of Vallioor division intervend this matter and filed the suit against the two rich men of this village. By the verdict of court they lost their property.

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With the effort of Major Thaniyal Arulanandam of V.N.Kulam converted as Salvationist, with the tireless effort of Arulanandam, the villagers of Paramesvarapuram, Neduvali, Pattarkulam, Kariyavilai, Amaiyadi and Kuttinarkulam, Uruamangkulam, Pottaikulam, Chokkalingampuram, Sithalankulam, Nambikuricai, Kombankulam, Piriyammalpuram, Pappankulam, Ramakrishnapuram, Vijaya Narayananam, Senbagaramanallur, Mulaikaraipatti, Thangager Kannanallur, Chinnammalpuram, Perumpalanchi, Vagaikulam, Malayankudiirruppu, Neerunjikadu, Saidammalpuram, Thandayarkulam, Ammachikoil, Vadalivilai and Uththadi. In 1926 Salvation Army work started at Thalavaipuram on 7.1.1922, Major. Uitthaprakash started his work at Kottaiyadi. With the help of Koilpillai Nadar Salvation Army Church was established at Selva Maruthur.

**Nambi Thoppu**

On 8.1.1922 Major Uitthaprakash convened the Salvation Army meeting at Thenkarai, Mahiladi and Nambi Thoppu. 77 persons of Thenkarai and 173 persons of Nambi Thoppo became the Salvationists. Lawyer Devadas of Nambi Thoppu supported the service of Salvation Army and also appeared at the court for the welfare of Salvationists.

In 1933 Salvation Army started its work at Kattalai Village. Then Ervadi Village. Pannaiatheru village is situated at the eastern side of Nanguneri. Vannaramadan of this village became Salvationists and changed his name as

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3. *The War Cry* 1922, February
Vedamanickam. Upto 1941 he served as the subedar of this area. Arumugam alais Asirdas Nadar of Thangayam was responsible to establish Salvation Army here. He gave one share of tenth portion of annual income to the Army. After his death his son served as the Subedar of this place.

By the disturbance of Maravas the people of Vijayanarayanam joined the Salvation Army. Yesudoss, son of Muthu, of this village became the official of Salvation Army. At last he became the social service secretary of provincial secretary.

**Priammalpuram**

During 1930s at Vattavilai near Nanguneri in Tirunelveli District, some of the Sambavar community people accepted Christ. So the Hindu Maravas were annoyed with them and tortured them in many ways. For these people they used coconut l shells as cups. As minority people they were not able to oppose the Maravas. So the Salvation Army purchased a new land and shifted the village from Vattavilai to the new place. In the new village the Maravas cannot dominate.

As the Salvation Army purchased the land, the village people called it as Priyaammalpuram, in the name of Commissioner Priya. By this the Savary of the people came to an end. In 1974 the Salvation Army supported the poor village people of Sankanankulam when the Maravas raped Mrs. Rajaselvam and burnt her husband. The strong help of the Salvation Army only released the

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4 Personnel Interview with Mrs. Raja Selvam, 11.11.2011.
Sambava people from the cruel hands of the high caste people. During the time of the Rajaselvam case some village people scattered from Sankanankulam to various places.

**Palayamkottai**

In 1953 Mrs. Senior Captain Paripuranam halted at Palayamkottai. Then Lt. Jeyadhoss was appointed here. In 1979 Palayamkottai became the provincial head quarters of Salvation Army. On 2.7.1994 a big chapel of Salvation Army work was established at Palayamkottai.

**Zion Nagar**

Valioor Division General S.P.Thaniyal started Salvation Army work at Karuvelankulam. He changed its name as Zion Nagar.

**Sivanthipatti**


**Seranmahadevi**

In 1940 Major Thaniyal began the Army work at Seranmahadevi in 1943. Army works were started in 1942 and 1943. Lt. M. Pakiyananthan started Army work at Viravanallur and Arikasavanallur. In 1941 Army’s were work started at Sindamani and Ayirapperi.5

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5. *The War Cry* 1943 June
Sambavarvadakari

In 1942 Army was works was started at Sambavarvadakarai and Aiykudi. In 1938 - 1939 Assistant V.J. Chelliah started Army’s work in Oppaniyarpuram village at Tenkasi. Then Army spread its doctrine at Idaikal, Vadakarai, ValliyamMalpuram and Thatchankudiriuppu.

Nelkattumseval

In the middle of 1940, Carnal Nallathambi conducted special Arathanai at Nelkattumseval. Out of 150 people, 36 people accepted Jesus Christ. Then Army started its work at Vadomalapuram. Andarkulam, Athuvali and Eaccham Pottal Puthoor. In the beginning of 1944, Army began its work at Pudupatti and Pakkampatti. In 1940, 67 peoples of Periya Kovalankulam accepted the Christ on 05.07.1940. Army established its office here. Lt. Cornel Pakiyanathan of Vallioor Division spread the good news to the people of Ambasamudram taluk Through cycle riding.

Palayamkottai Division

Palayamkottai Division headquarters is situated at 28, Bell Amoreces Colony, Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli. From 15.05.2002 Major M. Alexander and Major S. Nalini Jeya Chandra Served as the Divisional Commanders and Major. Yesoretinam and Major. V. Rukmani served as Divisional Youth Secretaries. From 01.05.2002 Major A. Asirbai served as a Statistical Officer.

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6  *The War Cry* 1939 November.
From 15.05.2002 Captain S. Justin and Captain A. Celin served as the Corps officers of central hall and Captain G. Gnana Stephen Raj and Captain Esahilla served as the Corps Officer at Melachevel.


Sivanthipatti and Rettiypatti come under the oversight of district headquarters. Y. Ruban Buel served as the Corps helper at Ponnakudy and Karuppu Katty from 25.06.2003. P. Edwin served as the Corps helper at Veeravanallur, Arikesavanallur, Erukkalaipatty served as the Corps officers at Thoppur and V.K.Nagar from 15.05.2002. Major M. Lazer and Major M. Rajammal served as the Divisional Commanders of Tenkasi Division from 15.05.2002 and Major C. Swamidhas and Major. D. Vasantha served as the Divisional Youth Secretary from 01.05.2003. Chinthamani, Packanery and Aayeraperi come under the oversight of Divisional Headquarter. CAND helper Sam David and N. Sudha served as Corps at Andarkulam including K.S. Mangalam and V.K. Patty society from 01.07.2003. Capt. G. Markoni and Capt. V. Mala served at Athuvazhy Corps including Vasudevanallor out post and Visvanathaperi out posts from 17.05.2001. Major D. Subash Chandran and Major D. Alice served at Edaikal Corps including

Vallioor Division

Major M. John Rose and Major R. Jebamony served as the Divisional Commanders of Vallioor Division from 17.05.2001. Major Thomas and Major M. Ratna bai served as the Divisional Secretary from 01.05.2003. Major P. Karunidhas and Major M. Joice served as the Divisional Youth Secretary from 01.10.2002. Sanganankulam and Eranthy Corps came under the over sight of divisional headquarters from 01.05.2003 and 01.07.2003.


**Radhapuram Division**

Major A. Yesudhasan and Major Esther served as Division Commander from 17.5.2001. Capt. C.Ebenezer and Capt. T.Grace served as Division Youth Secretary from 1.5.03 and Helper Prem Kumar served at Amayady from 1.7.03. Capt. Bright Singh, Capt. R.Saratha served at Ambalvanapuram, Kilakulam, Kumarapuram, Mariyesingapuram and Keelkulum from 17.05.2001. Capt.S.P.Muthu and Capt. S. Dhayabai served at Arasarkulam from 1.5.03. Kaduthula came under the oversight of Division Head Quarters. Candidate S.Murugan Muthuraj served at kuttinainarkulam and Perunidnankulam from 1.7.03. Capt. J.Jeyakumar and Capt.D.Helan had served at Neduvazhy, Pattarkulam and


**Army in Kanyakumari**

Kanyakumari the place where three seas are coming together was ruled by the Travancore kings. In those days the Brahmins and the other high caste people lived in higher respect. At the same time lowcaste people were treated very badly. They were not allowed to enter into the temples. They were treated as slaves. Though the father of nation made agitations against this kind of untouchabilities, there was no reaction in the state of Travancore.

The low caste people such as Sambavars, Nadars, Elavars, Scavangers and Barbars etc were treated as slaves and untouchables. These people should not use the public roads and conveniences.

Even the dead bodies were not allowed to be carried through the public roads. Such was the situation in Kanyakumari district when the Army came to launch its missionary zeal.
When Walter Keil started his work in the black rock estate, he worked in the nearby estate also. That estate was called as the Kinny malai estate. In that estate all the cooli workers were from the Sambavar community. During these days Mr. Charles Earnest Cox, the son of Mr. Cox accepted Jesus and became a Salvation Army officer. He had his training in Chennai for 3 months and appointed to 7 Talakudi Corps. (One of the biggest villages in Thovala Taluk).

The workers in Black Rock Estate used to go home during the harvest season. Following these cooli workers the Army officers also went to the villages. So Army meetings were started in Panayoor and Kundal. The fast growth of the Army work in Kinny Malai Estate was stopped by the Estate owner.

But the missionaries went to the villages of the Sambavar community people. The work was established in Ratnapuram, Alady, Kadampadi, Valalgham and surrounding villages.

**Coming of Yesurathnam and The Boom Marches**

At the end of 1890 Yesurathnam and forty other officers were commissioned to improve the Army work among the Nadar community people in Kanyakumari district. Among 40 officers there were two women officers. They were Elizabeth Geikie (Porumaiammal) and McIraith (Anbai). Captain Yesurathnam asked the officers to live like the poor people. Captain Devasundaram of Arcot district was appointed as assistant to Yesurathnam. This Deva Sundaram belongs to Sambavar community. The Salvation Army party
worked very hard among the Nadar people more than 1 ½ years. The result was that only 50 people joined the Army.

Yesurathnam and his party were so tired and they wanted to start the work in a different way. In this mean time a village people of Sambavar community requested the Army people to start the Salvation Army. By their request meeting was conducted in the village. People accepted Jesus Christ and threw away the idols from their houses.

On seeing this activity the missionary party was so happy. But the happiness did not last long. The village people withdrew themselves from their new faith, because of the threatening of their high caste masters. On knowing this sad story Devasundaram began to fast and pray. But there was no immediate response. In the beginning of 1892 there was a great victory in Gujarat through boom marches. On knowing this Yesurathnam also started 'Boom marches' in Travancore. Forty six officers joined with Yesurathnam and started the 'Boom marches'.

While 'ANBAT' wrote about the 'Boom Marches', she told that with the request of Devasundaram only we started the 'Boom marches'. In the month of May 1892 we started the march on 27th May. We prayed in a place near the medicine hill which is very close to the village Attakulam. This was the village which first accepted Christ and then backslided. Devasundaram wanted to restore these people once again for Christ. While they were praying he had two visions. The first one is thousands of people in Red Coat (which was the uniform of the then Salvation Army officers) following the Army flag. The second one is lot of
fishes coming towards the shore from the ocean. On seeing these visions, leaving the others in prayer, Devasundaram went to the Attakulam village and preached Christ.

On that day the village people once again whole-heartedly accepted Christ and Mr. Suvisesamuthu was the 1st man who accepted Christ in the village. His son-in-law Mr. Paramanantham gave his place for erecting the Church in that village. The present Church is in the place given by Mr. Suvisesamuthu, the son of Mr. Paramanantham. This great day was May 27th 1892.

This became the ‘red letter day’ in the history of the Salvation Army in Kanyakumari district as well as in the history of the Sambavar community people of Tamil Nadu.

**Persecution and Prosecutions**

"Great, Spiritual Harvests are not gathered by the Fireside" said George Scottrailton. In Travancore, the success of the Boom marches gave rise to bitter opposition on the part of the high caste Hindu population. They had successfully defeated the efforts of the missionaries to make roads among their own castes and they viewed if not with equal alarm, atleast with hostility, the rapid progress the Army people were making among those whom they had for countless ages regarded as hereditary serfs. They felt that the ground was slipping from beneath their feet.
Already a considerable proportion of the population of Travancore had openly professed Christianity. The census of 1921 shows the number of native Christians as 11,72,934 out of a total population of 40,06,000.

During the months of June and July 1892 great advances were made in the salvation warfare. Many lands of barrack buildings were given by the villages. About a dozen schools were started for the children of the converts.

In the month Dec 1921 the high caste people persecuted the young Christians seriously. They burnt one of the halls and charged false cases against the young Salvationist.

A great number of the converts were devil dancers and their changed life became monuments of God's saving power. The high caste people tried to bring back the new converts for devil dancing. But they failed. Ensign Jeya Deebam tells about the devil dancing at Kadaichergi an attempt was made to perform the devil dancing in front of the Salvation Army hall. A great crowd of Hindus collected and the music began. A devil dancer from another village was brought and prepared for his performance.

A few Salvationists who were present prayed honestly to God to defeat the devil. Inspite of all their efforts and shouting no devil would come upon the man and after an hour or two they retired comforted.

In January (1922) the caste people became more and more desperate. In their attacks upon the Army. About 4 miles from Cape Comerin is the large temple of Suchindram which is of such importance that even the king of
Travancore has to fast during some of its festivals. The plot of the high caste people was to capture some Salvationists and carry them into the precincts of the temple. Which would desecrate it then, to call the police and charge the Salvationists with willfully invading the place with intent to attack and destroy the idol. But Adjutant Yesuratnam heard of the plot informed the Government and of course saw that the road to the temple was carefully avoided by the Army people.

At the failure of their plans, they had waited for Adjutant Yesuratnam. It was nearly midnight and very dark when the unsuspecting adjutant started on his homeward journey from Karkadu. He had not gone far before the Ruffians sprang out upon him. He ran back for his life. But the gang swiftly followed him and beat him unmercifully and let him lying helpless alone on the road. After a little time he managed to get back to the village.

His persecutors came in a crowd to kill him. But Yesu Ratnam escaped through the back window of the hall. In the mean time the enemies broke open the door and entered into the hall. When they realized that the missionary escaped they burnt the barracks of the Army.

At the end of March 1894 the court cases against the Salvation Army Christians had all been settled except one. The one case outstanding afterwords became notorious. A Tamil lieutenant by name Mancikam entered a caste street in Talakudi during a festival to buy some plantains.
This lad was of Vellala community. But having in the Army worked among the paraiyas (Dalits), the lad was seized and carried to the police court. The police court charged his bail for Rs.500/-. Appeal was made to the Diwan of Travancore and the British President. But no relief. But the police authorities dragged the boy to the station more than 16 times. In the end he was sentenced to 20 days imprisonment. Before this case was over, the Salvation Army church in Karkadu was burnt by the high caste people.

Eventhough Manickam belongs to Vellala caste, members which are allowed in any Brahmin street. Except on occasion of a wedding when Brahmins are eating, this boy was purposly taken to the police station as he was working among the Sambavar (Dalit) communities.

Talakudi

One of the biggest villages in Thovala Taluk in Kanyakumari district. The population of this village comprised of every castes. Vellalas the highest in number Brahmins the leaders among the high caste and other people. The Vellalas being landlords had the Sambavar community people as their slaves and coolies. There was an unwritten law that every Sambavar community people should attend the planting of paddy's in rich men's fields. Once an young lady who was in lull pregnancy brought to the field and yoked with another animal and blowed. The lady died. Because of these death the people of the low caste community woke up from their lengthy slumber and accepted Christianity. Like this so many incidents took place.
Ratna Puram

A village stands as a monument for Commissioner William Stevens suffered a great deal in the hands of the high caste Hindus. The community people worked as coolies in their master’s house. As there were no concrete Roads in those days when the Sambavar community people walked on the streets the sands may show the footprints of the persons. To avoid that footprints the high caste masters ordered their servants to tie a rope round about their neck connected with a dried palmleaf. This situation was changed when the Salvation Army worked among the people. The high caste people compelled the Christians to follow the Hinduism. When they refused the huts of the Christians were burnt. Because of this a case was filed in the Ernakulam court in 1920, the young Christians were helpless. At that time the Salvation Army rescued them from the clutches of the high caste masters. Yesuratnam helped the people to purchase new land for their village. So the people called the new village unanimously "RETNAPURAM" in memory of Yesuratnam.

Srikonam - Chekumodu

In the early days of the 20th century the Dalit Christians were not accepted as people of respect by the high caste man died the body of the dead person was burnt very close to the Sambavar community village. If the wind is blowing from east the burnings will be taken place in the eastern side of the village. If the wind is from the west the burnings will be taken place in western side of the village.
Because the high caste people wanted to show that the low caste people are their slaves. During 1930's when Colonel P.Nallathambi was Divisional Commander in Thuckalay, one similar incident took place. On knowing this, Colonel P.N.Thambi rushed to the spot and throw away the burning dead body into the river and warned the high caste people not to do that. As the Salvation Army interfered this kind of silly attitude was stopped.